

Forum

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FROM THE LABOUR STANDARD -2

By Frederick Engels

THE WAGES SYSTEM

In a previous article we examined the time-honoured motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work", and came to the conclusion that the fairest day's wages under present social conditions is necessarily tantamount to the very unfairest division of the workman's produce, the greater portion of that produce going into the capitalist's pocket, and the workman having to put up with just as much as will enable him to keep himself in working order and to propagate his race.

This is a law of political economy, or, in other words, a law of the present economical organisation of society, which is more powerful than all the common and Statute law of England put together, the Court of Chancery included. While society is divided into two opposing classes - on the one hand the capitalists, monopolisers of the whole of the means of production, land, raw materials, machinery; on the other hand, labourers, working people deprived of all property in the means of production, owners of nothing but their own working power; while this social organisation exists the law of wages will remain all-powerful and will every day afresh rivet the chains by which the working man is made the slave of his own produce monopolised by the capitalist.

The Trade Unions of this country have now for nearly sixty years fought against this law - with what result? Have they succeeded in freeing the working class from the bondage in which capital - the produce of its own hands - holds it? Have they enabled a single section of the working class to arise above the situation of wage-slaves, to become owners of their own means of production, of the raw materials, tools, machinery required in their trade, and thus to become the owners of the produce of their own labour? It is well known that not only have they not done so, but that they never tried.

Far be it from us to say that Trades Unions are of no use because they have not done that. On the contrary, Trades Unions in England, as well as in every other manufacturing country, are a necessity for the working classes in their struggle against capital. The average rate of wages is equal to the sum of necessaries sufficient to keep up the race of workmen in a certain country according to the standard of life habitual in that country. That standard of life may be very different for different classes of workmen. The great merit of Trades Unions, in their struggle to keep up the rate of wages and to reduce working hours, is that they tend to keep up and to raise the standard of life. There are many trades in the East-end of London whose labour is not more skilled and quite as hard as that of bricklayers and bricklayers' labourers, yet they hardly earn half the wages of these. Why? Simply because a powerful organisation enables the one set to maintain a comparatively high standard of life as the rule by which their wages

submit not only to unavoidable but also to arbitrary encroachments of their employers; their standard of life is gradually reduced, they learn how to live on less and less wages, and their wages naturally fall to that level which they themselves have learnt to accept as sufficient.

The law of wages, then, is not one which draws a hard and fast line. It is not inexorable with certain limits. There is at every time (great depression excepted) for every trade a certain latitude within which the rate of wages may be modified by the results of the struggle between the two contending parties. Wages in every case are fixed by a bargain, and in a bargain he who resists longest and best has the greatest chance of getting more than his due. If the isolated workman tries to drive his bargain with the capitalist he is easily beaten and has to surrender at discretion; but if a whole trade of workmen form a powerful organisation, collect among themselves a fund to enable them to defy their employers if need be, and thus become enabled to treat with these employers as a power, then, and then only, have they a chance to get even that pittance which according to the economical constitution of present society, may be called a fair day's wages for a fair day's work.

The law of wages is not upset by the struggles of Trades Unions. On the contrary, it is enforced by them. Without the means of resistance of the Trades Unions the labourer does not receive even what is his due according to the rules of the wages system. It is only with the fear of the Trades Unions before his eyes that the capitalist can be made to part with the full market value of his labourer's power. Do you want a proof? Look at the wages paid to the members of the large Trades Unions, and at the wages paid to the numberless small trades in that pool of stagnant misery, the East-end of London.

Thus the Trades Unions do not attack the wages system. But it is not the highness or lowness of wages which constitutes the economical degradation of the working class: this degradation is comprised in the fact that, instead of receiving for its labour the full produce of this labour, the working class has to be satisfied with a portion of its own produce called wages. The capitalist pockets the whole produce (paying the labourer out of it) because he is the owner of the means of labour. And, therefore, there is no real redemption for the working class until it becomes owner of all the means of work - land, raw material, machinery etc. - and thereby also the owner of THE WHOLE OF THE PRODUCE OF ITS OWN LABOUR.

(The Labour Standard, London. May 21st, 1881.)

IT IS YOUR JOURNAL - USE IT!

If you have a point of view that you wish to put to the membership, or if you wish to take part in the controversies already raised in these pages, send your contributions to the I.P.J. Committee at Head Office. Please write on one side of the paper only, and leave an adequate margin on both sides. Better still, have your articles typed.

FORUM NUMBER FIVE

The next issue should be published at the beginning of August, and will include the following :-

Trade Unions
Value re-examined.
Let the Party Sing.

By F. Engels.
By A.W. Ivimey.
By O.C. I.

By J. Trotman

In the January Forum Comrade Hardy utilises three pages to avoid replying to my arguments in the previous issue. On the first page he does this by discussing matters which he himself says are 'all irrelevant'.

He objects to my allegation that the circular to branches contained a false innuendo as to Comrade Mayes' political sympathies. As this seemed obvious to more members than just myself he should welcome the opportunity to deny the intention, and I am pleased that he has done so. When, however, he accuses me of attributing WORDS to the statement which are not there, I must ask him to quote the words or retract.

The next three paragraphs are devoted to my jibe about his complacency. He was right to protest and I apologise for causing any unnecessary friction. But, having recognised this as a jibe, why does he go on to treat it as an argument and say how silly it would be for him to argue in this manner on the question of dilapidations? Would it not have been better for him to have shown how he would have in fact dealt with my arguments on this point?

Comrade Hardy spends almost another page dealing with my observation that he misrepresents the Party case in saying that the Party 'was opposed in principle to supporting reforms'. He says that this quote had been snatched from its context. He puts it back; but far from being modified by its context, the quoted passage will be seen to extend and make inaccurate a statement which would otherwise be correct. In case there is any doubt about what is meant, the inaccuracy is repeated in the final paragraph of the circular which I quote here with full context:-

'While it is obviously not necessary to re-affirm the Party's attitude against supporting social reform legislation, it can do nothing but good that party members to whom these original controversies may not be familiar, should be reminded of the principles on which the Party was formed.' (My emphasis).

When I pointed out that the Party case - far from being opposed to reforms on principle - was that our M.P's would support reforms on their merits, I did not say that we changed our position in 1910 but that we asserted our attitude then and have not changed it since.

EVADING THE ISSUE

Comrade Hardy goes on to point out that the 1910 discussion was concerned with measures actually before the House and had nothing to do with measures or campaigns to be initiated by us. Whilst he does not actually put these words into our mouths, he does attribute to us a 'desire to announce advance support of rent control' and says there is no precedent for this in the 1910 discussions. What a muddle! Firstly: how does one announce advance support for a measure which has been in existence for over fifty years? Secondly: I was not concerned with appeals to

precedent, in fact I specifically divorced myself from such methods. I was not even concerned at this juncture that the circular was opposed to the Party case, but that members who may not be aware of the position were being misled as to what the Party attitude is.

Comrade Hardy says that I objected to his article 'The Economics of Rent Control' because it did not deal with the current issue of decontrol. In fact I made this point about his method with regard to the circular criticising Comrade Mayes and showed the purpose it served. No objection. Comrade Hardy can argue how he likes. As to the article; apart from the point at issue it was excellent. It will be remembered that all the statistics used to destroy the arguments in the circular were taken from it.

Perhaps it is because he can hardly disagree with his own statements that he completely ignores my arguments about the effects of increases and decreases of rents and contents himself with reiterating the statements he made originally. Except, that is, where he challenged the statistical accuracy of figures which were clearly arbitrary and made no reference to statistics. I am sure Comrade Hardy knows this to be a normal method of demonstrating a general principle - simpler than making use of algebraic symbols with which some members may not be familiar - for it was used frequently by Marx, I can therefore only regard such a challenge as facetious.

As for the rest he has got the impression that I think industrial action is hopeless. At least this is what he says. If he will read carefully the last section of my article he will see that it was devoted to demonstrating that, on immediate issues, both the industrial and political aspects of the class struggle are equally important and necessary, and that neither are hopeless if carried on together, but to renounce one as Comrade Hardy would have us do, would inevitably weaken the effect of the other, and is therefore non-Marxist and against the interests of the working class.

This was the very basis on which the whole of my position rested, and it was this which Comrade Hardy did not even attempt to answer, except for the quite inexcusable misrepresentation mentioned above.

THE LETTER FROM R.M.

In contrast to all this, I was pleased to see in the same issue the letter from Comrade R.M. who makes some pertinent observations which must be considered. He suggests for instance, that being a small minority there is nothing we can do at the moment. It is not entirely true, however, that nothing can be done. Our propaganda has some effect, however small, on public opinion; and public opinion does matter. Even Comrade Hardy recognises this in his article. When the Party has representatives on the floor of the House or in local councils we will have a direct effect through the vote.

It is true that this particular issue may be dead by then, but it is only by expressing our attitude to this and every other aspect of capitalism that we can demonstrate to workers our worthiness of their support as their

representatives in Parliament. We obviously cannot adopt one attitude outside of Parliament and another when we get in. But it will be remembered that Comrade Hardy did not say that this was a working class issue but we should ignore it. This would have been bad enough. He said in fact that it was not even a working class issue, which makes matters worse by being wrong into the bargain.

Comrade R.M. also points out that to adopt my attitude would involve many difficult problems. This, no doubt, is quite true, but I am afraid I cannot accept this as a criticism of my case. If the position is correct but difficult, it is no solution to substitute for it one that is easy but wrong. The answer is more knowledge, more original thought, and constructive discussion. Anybody who is afraid of problems should give up politics. All politics is difficult and that aimed at the total re-organisation of human society is not likely to be an exception. At least not if they are to be scientific and practical. Plausible utopias are always easy to describe if not to construct.

R.M. has rightly seen that to take a positive attitude on rent control implies a positive attitude on a host of other issues, and he asks where do we stop? Unfortunately, the correct answer is again unpalatable, but I have no intention of evading the issue. The answer is simply that, where working class interests are effected, the party of the working class can never stop; can never stand aside from the class struggle, or any part of it, until those social conditions have been established in which classes no longer exist.

It has been said that time spent in dealing with every day issues such as rent control is time taken from the propagation of socialism. This is surprising as in fact the majority of our propaganda already concerns itself with every day issues (e.g.) the article on rent control. My concern is not with people of Comrade Hardy's conviction not dealing with these issues but the way in which they deal with them. This is primarily a question of attitude.

A case which is oversimplified to the point of inaccuracy may well continue to attract the youthful rebel, but it will only repel the more mature and thoughtful workers whom we will so badly need to help us overcome the many difficulties which Comrade R.M. envisages. They will be attracted to us only if our attitude reflects a more logical if slightly more difficult theoretical basis. That basis is the Materialist Conception of History which, it seems, an increasing number of members either do not appreciate or do not apply.

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SOME FACTS AND FIGURES FROM U.S.A.
CONCERNING THE OLD FOLK

By J.E. Roe

Medical and social sciences are not as closely allied as salt and pepper or boiled beef and carrots. On special points one may be as cold as an Eskimo pie and the others as hot as Lana Turner's love letters. The theme we have in mind is the old folks' problem, and how it is handled by those who function in the sphere of medicine, and those who confine their practices to political and social operations.

For half a century medical science has made marked changes in the human span of life. It has added almost a score of years to the period which formerly elapsed between the cradle and the cemetery. At the turn of the century it was considered a remarkable achievement to reach the age of 65. Nearly everyone tried it, but only 3,000,000 American men and women managed to do it. There were many obstacles to surmount to make the race easy and popular.

Confined within the nation there are at present 15,000,000 men and women over the age of 65, and even this figure is going up instead of down. The crystal ball boys tell us that by 1975, without wholesale evacuation, one person out of every ten will be over 65, instead of one out of 25 as in 1900.

Medical science has contributed much to this turn in human affairs. The elimination of disease-breeding sewers and swamps, the changing of diet, the deletion of injurious food preservatives, the introduction of miracle drugs to combat a lot of diseases, as well as many minor innovations, have lengthened the time we can spend playing solitaire or checkers.

But this dragging out of the life-line has not been brought about without resultant grievous problems in the social sphere. The anticipated joys of the "golden years" are faded and lost in the shuffle. It was pleasant to look forward to a time of unstinted leisure when elderly specimens of both sexes could travel and see the world they missed in youth, watch the spinning of roulette wheels in the gaming casinos of Monte Carlo, hear the yodeling around attractive Swiss chalets, inhale the fragrance from oriental cherry blossom festivals, or lazily loll about the beaches at Acapulco, or Palm Beach.

There are in this peculiar land people over 65 who can well afford to indulge in such felicitous pastimes. They belong to the lucky element that owns and controls property which guarantees an income capable of coping with any charge on the luxuries of life; their twilight years can be and are supplied with what it takes to make people happy and serene.

But there is another side to the picture - a dark, uncongenial and repellent side. Thirty per cent of those who reach 65 have no incomes of their own. They never had enough wages or salaries in their working years to put by anything to ameliorate the agonies of age. They have to depend upon their children, other relatives, or charitable institutions to keep body and soul together.

Government statistics, which cannot afford to make mistakes, inform us that the average income of those who jump the 65-year barricade amounts to the colossal sum of 960 dollars a year, or a miserable 80 bucks a month. Social security, old age pensions, and private pension programs are all being drawn upon to brighten the sombre side of the social picture, and keep something resembling life in the ageing bodies.

Currently 9,000,000 people are getting monthly insurance checks from the Social Security Administration. These payments average 74 dollars per month for workers without dependents, 68 dollars for widows, 126 dollars for a retired couple. Under the terms of the Social Security Act federal grants to states are authorised to supply the meagre allotments to the needy aged. Annuities and private pensions make up shortages in some directions.

About half a million elders are cooped up in old people's homes, nursing homes, and other city dumps, where they can pass the time twiddling their thumbs, staring at grey, cold ceilings, and wondering whether it is beans or spaghetti that will decorate the festive board at the impending meal.

The picture gets gloomier the more we concentrate on it. And what is being done by our politicians and statesmen to change the colour and direction of the social scene? We hear much of bi-partisanship in the Capitol. But social ignorance seems to be the only real bi-partisan policy. It applies to them all from top to bottom. When those in the highest positions can formulate no solution, it is reasonable to suppose that those lower down the scale are MINUS means for social betterment.

A good many years ago President Coolidge made the brilliant observation that "when many workers are out of jobs for a definite period, unemployment results". We should guess it would. President Hoover envisaged a couple of Plymouth Rocks in every pot and a couple of Chevrolets in every garage, only a few months before an economic crash that in many cases wiped out pots and garages, as well as their mythical contents.

President Roosevelt, out of experiences gained from a long and unique career, evolved the profound conclusion that "we have nothing to fear but fear itself". President Truman decided that a condition of three or four million unemployed was a healthy state of affairs, as it kept the people on their toes to hold their jobs. President Eisenhower could see the perfect picture of social security only inside the jails and prisons.

All of them are fitful followers of the inquisitive Queen who asked why, if the workers couldn't get bread to eat, why not give them cake?

One learned legislator in the Capitol simulates concern for the old folks' welfare. One of the temporary solutions continually stressed is that jobs be provided for those who are physically fit, even when they are past 65. The Federal Council on the Ageing say that millions of older people find it necessary and desirable to continue working at some kind of paying job. Compulsory retirement has forced

them out of their life-long career jobs, but they must find part-time work in other fields.

A job not only supplies them with a source of income. After they have been bossed and robbed for so many years, the procedure has penetrated their systems to such an extent that they feel much more contented if they can still be drained of a little of the life-force they once possessed.

For several years the U.S. Employment Service has been pushing an "older worker" program to help men and women over 65 to find suitable jobs. They try hard to promote the idea that older citizens are even better than young workers in many types of jobs. They give top priority to older workers because of loyalty, judgement, experience and reliability, as well as other desirable characteristics.

But their counsel and advice has not been heeded. The astute employers are aware that young workers suit them better. They are quicker on the move, more responsive to stimuli, easier to mould into the firm's activities, more adaptable to customers' requirements, they can discuss baseball, prize-fighting, dancing and checkers while the buyer assays the merchandise offered.

Even when one oldster is found who can measure up to the store criterion, he is immediately under suspicion. How come that he is physically fit at his age? There is only one logical answer; he did not work hard enough at the jobs he held in his youth, and if he was lazy then, he is even worse now. The wholesale influx of senior citizens into industry is definitely out.

They congregate in eating places where a pile of toast costs a nickel and a bowl of soup retails at a dime. They swap scratch sheets and play like mad, but on paper only. When they talk of going "across the water", it does not mean a leisurely sea cruise to the happy hunting haunts of Tokyo or Manila. It simply means a short trip over the Bay to Oakland. Their lives are a string of drab and sordid events, and capitalism seems bent on keeping them so.

If one looks across the sea to Great Britain, the old age pensioners are about in the same plight. Wherever the Wages System exists, this evil exists.

Pensions will not be needed under Socialism, because from the cradle to the grave one and all will be able to live healthy, happy lives, because things will be produced for use instead of for profit. For the first time in history mankind will control their destiny.

This article is based upon facts and figures supplied by J.A. MACDONALD, EDITOR OF "ON THE RECORD", SAN FRANCISCO, U.S.A.

W.B. OF UPTON PARKTHE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S REPLY TO THE "OPEN LETTER"

The circularisation of members of the Party by means of an "Open Letter" published by a self-constituted committee could only be justified if the ordinary channels of Party discussion were closed; but the "committee" cannot even pretend that such is the case. They do, however, imply that the "Open Letter" was rendered "necessary" by lack of discussion of the above-mentioned reply. The suggestion is not true. Apart from two Conference discussions, there have been a Party meeting, several divisional meetings and numerous branch meetings specially convened to discuss the matter. And it is also false to imply that the delegates to the Conference failed in their duty to report the discussion to the branch members.

Ample opportunity existed and still exists for discussion, and the only apparent reason for the use of the "Open Letter" by the "committee" is the crushing defeat their attempts at argument have always sustained in the course of open discussion in the ordinary way.

Apart, therefore, from the errors and misrepresentations of the "Open Letter" (which injure the Party and make it necessary to point out the unsoundness of some of our own members) its promoters are guilty of attempting to form an organisation within the Party, directed against the Party's accepted position, and of thus initiating a policy of sectionalism and disruption.

The self-styled committee demand the revocation of the afore-mentioned reply BECAUSE, they say, it contradicts our declaration of principles. But neither in their circular nor in the course of the whole discussion have they been able to point out this so-called contradiction. And the reason is a simple one. IT IS BECAUSE NO SUCH CONTRADICTION EXISTS.

They maintain that the "reply contains matter of a 'speculative character'". Yet it is actually a most cautious statement based on positive knowledge and experience. It contains nothing more speculative than an implication that historic laws will continue to be operative - than which few things are more certain. On the other hand, it may be of interest to note that the "committee" make the highly speculative statement that the capitalist class "are compelled to open up ever new avenues of education to the proletariat!"

It is said that we should simply refer enquiries to the declaration of principles. It may be necessary for the "committee" to fob off questioners in some such way, but a reasonable query by a genuine enquirer should be frankly met. It is, moreover, the height of absurdity to refer the enquirer to the declaration of principles for information it does not contain.

It is entirely untrue that we are not prepared to give such replies (as that to W.B.) from our Press and platform. The reply in question appeared in the SOCIALIST STANDARD, and similar statements have repeatedly been made in the "S.S." and from our platform. Indeed, the inability to reply to such a query could only indicate an ignorance of the Socialist position or an incapacity for propaganda work. "Several members" it is alleged by the "committee" maintain that we

have, besides a "primary object" a "secondary object" which we "keep in the background". After being challenged the "committee" endeavoured to foster these statements on various members, but, of course, without success. The statements are sheer inventions.

"No member of the Party", we next learn, "is elected to Parliament for the purpose of taking part in any kind of legislation, whether by voting for or against it". On this point members of the "committee" have had curious changes of front, but of the fatuity of their present statement it need only be pointed out that it even excludes voting for Socialism!

And what of their further assertion that the S.P.G.B. advocates Parliamentary action "as one of the possible means" of obtaining control of the political machinery? The members who make that statement have signed the declaration of principles which distinctly states in par. 6:-

"That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation."

Comment is superfluous.

The "committee" admit, in emphatic italics, that the capitalist class "are compelled to dig their own graves", but they do not quite realise that in saying so they have riddled their own case, and conceded much more than was claimed in the Feb., 1910 "S.S.".

The majority of the Party are next accused of dividing the "capitalist measures" to be supported under four different heads. Unfortunately for the "committee", however, the only members known to so divide "capitalist measures", or any other measures, are the writers of the "Open Letter".

And regarding the measures thus conveniently divided we are treated to some most original "Socialist" teaching. While they correctly say that haggling for better conditions "by the workers with their masters are inevitable expressions of the class struggle", they go on to make the astounding assertion that this nevertheless and emphatically "constitutes action apart from the Socialist position". In fact, they go on to say: "attempts at mending such conditions are unquestionably detrimental to our object". All of which is, to use the language of the "committee", emphatically and "unquestionably" nonsense. It is in flat contradiction with the Party position as laid down in the Manifesto. And as Karl Marx says in "Value, Price, and Profit": "Such being the tendency of THINGS in this system, is this saying that the working class ought to renounce their resistance against the encroachments of capital, and abandon their attempts at making the best of the occasional chances for their temporary improvement? If they did they would be degraded to one level

mass of broken wretches past salvation. By cowardly giving way in their every-day conflict with capital they would certainly disqualify themselves for the initiating of any larger movement." The "committee" have not yet shown where Marx was wrong in this.

In the same par. they claim that from "our standpoint" it is absurd to admit that "legislation can also play a part in determining the conditions of wage-slave labour." From the "committee's" standpoint, of course, anything may be absurd, but they have no right to speak for the Party, for the veriest tyro in economic history is aware that legislation has practically from its origin "played a part in determining the conditions of wage-slave labour." Hundreds of instances, from Thomas Wolsey to Asquith, might be given, but the matter is too obvious to require them.

We are then told that the Socialist Party has no mandate "to stand for the saving of life and limb of the workers." Yet the declaration of principles shows that the Party is the expression of the material interest of the working class. Further, the attainment of Socialism is dependent on the preservation of the workers in general, and the question of proletarian life and limb may have a very important bearing on the great issue.

The statement is put in quotation marks that "members of our Party" say that "as Socialists we are compelled to support such political measures as universal suffrage and the Referendum." No names are given, and the statement is a misrepresentation.

In the fourteenth paragraph it is said that "to admit the capitalist class to be the benefactors of the working class because they are compelled by the economic development to weaken their stronghold can only tend to efface the bitter hostility" etc. This insinuates either that the reply to "W.B., Upton Park, 'admits' "the capitalists to be full of kind intentions towards the workers - which is absolutely false - or that the weakening of the capitalists' stronghold is not of benefit to the workers - which is utterly stupid.

The "committee" next ask, how can Socialists support measures they cannot enforce. They would prevent us even supporting Socialism until it is here, because we cannot now enforce it! The "committee" should ask themselves how they can vote for a candidate if they are not numerous enough to elect him, or why they should use the vote at all - then they might find out just where they are.

And what an original picture they paint of the capitalists dividing themselves into factions to keep us busy backing up their legislation! As applied to the S.P.G.B., however, the picture implies a misrepresentation of the Party position and an insult to the membership.

We have, nevertheless, at least one opportunity of agreeing with the "committee". It IS absurd to insist that there is necessarily "a suspension of hostility to the capitalist class by supporting some of their measures." Do we not learn from their "Open Letter" that the capitalists are "compelled to dig their own graves" and "weaken their own stronghold"? Obviously, then, according to the "committee's" statements, the support of certain "capitalist" measures may be consistent with the most bitter hostility to that class.

The complexity of the capitalist system was never given at the Conference as the reason for supporting capitalist measures. Nor was it said that "Socialists were sent to parliament to assist in legislation."

While the upholders of the Party's position in this matter have never tired of pointing out the progressive crushing of the workers by economic development, they have, nevertheless, pointed to the whole of the facts, and not to a mere mutilated formula. It is suicide to deny the facts as the "committee" would have us do. Sectional benefits to the workers have occurred and do occur. And as Marx shows, working class action does put the brake on capitalism's downward trend, and is so far a benefit to the workers. Finally, it is in every case a positive benefit to the whole of the working class when they gain a new and effective weapon or a fresh coign of vantage in their fight for Socialism.

Before taking leave of the "Open Letter" we may note one or two of the strange inconsistencies which illustrate the incoherence of the "committee's" position.

They say that "the capitalist class are as powerless to interfere with economic development as the working class" and that they are "compelled to open up ever new avenues of education to the proletariat," and are also compelled by economic development to weaken their stronghold". On the other hand, they also tell us that the capitalist class can make or mar any measure "and can uphold or render nugatory any measure". Which is the real position? One excludes the other, and both are equally false. Their first statement is obviously wrong, for if economic development were not susceptible to human interference, we should not be active members of the Socialist Party, nor should we direct the fight against the capitalist class. Their second position credits the master class with omnipotence. It would mean, if true, that our fight were hopeless, and the Socialist Party unable to exist.

The reply the "committee" wish to revoke correctly interprets the declaration of principles. It points out the secondary role of the whole matter. It insists on the attitude of the representative being the expression of the Party's position in view of the full facts then to hand. And it frankly faces the eventualities of the situation in the light of working-class interests. As the Party has repeatedly stated, in the course of our fight we are prepared to take all we can get that will help our class.

The reasons we do not advocate reforms have been stated again and again in our Press and from our platform, and need no repeating here, while any measure that might conceivably benefit the workers would only be dealt with, favourably or otherwise, as dictated by the advancement of our object. Therefore it is absurd for the "committee" to suggest that we should have a programme of "reforms and palliatives". Even with regard to a useful proposal the complete measure would first have to be drawn up to avoid our being held responsible for, or expected to help, any fraudulent measure. Moreover, even if useful in one set of circumstances it might be harmful in another, and would often have to be sacrificed to the main issue which is our guiding star. Consequently a programme of the sort suggested is impossible to us, and in making the suggestion the "committee" either do not understand, or they misrepresent, the position of the Party in this matter.

As the first E.C. said in the editorial to the second number of the SOCIALIST STANDARD so we say now:-

"When a strong Socialist party, fighting directly for the establishment of a Socialist regime, and prepared in their progress to secure any advantage that will act as a new vantage ground in their further fight, is organised, then the capitalists will be only too ready to offer and to give each and all of those palliatives as a sop to the growing Socialist forces in the country.

"We have, therefore, to recognise all the time that it is only possible to secure any real benefit when the people themselves become class-conscious; when behind the Socialists in Parliament and on other bodies there stands a solid phalanx of men clear in their knowledge of Socialism and clear in their knowledge that the only way to secure the Socialist Commonwealth of the future is to depend only on the efforts of themselves and those who have the same class-conscious opinions".

And in the unique election address issued by the Party it clearly stated that "the candidates of the S.P.G.B., therefore, while quite prepared to use the local powers for such small temporary benefits as may be forced from the capitalists' hands for the workers in those districts, nevertheless do not seek suffrage for this, which can only be a secondary business of the political party of the workers". And it went on to point out how little could be obtained short of Socialism.

The E.C., therefore, has simply upheld what has been the policy of the Party since its formation. To do otherwise, indeed, would be to stultify the Party and sacrifice the working class to half understood phrases.

The self-styled committee itself is not of one mind on the matter, and one of their number has already recognised that his position is inconsistent with adhesion to the declaration of principles. The hollowness of their pretended arguments has again been shown, and it remains a fact that during the whole discussion not a single point has been successfully urged against the accepted position of the Party as laid down in the E.C.'s reply to W.B. of Upton Park.

August 5th 1911

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

PUBLIC MEETING

"NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND THE THREAT OF WAR"

Speakers: J. Read; C. May.

CO-OP HALL, 195, MARE STREET, E.8.

MONDAY JUNE 15th at 8.P.M.

PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE'S REPLY

To the MEMBERS OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

COMRADES,

The reply of the E.C. to the "Open Letter" of the Provisional Committee on the subject of revoking the answer given to W.B. of Upton Park is in all respects a most discreditable and vindictive production. Instead of being a dignified, outspoken retort to the points raised by the "Open Letter", as would be expected from the E.C. of the Socialist Party, it is a scurrilous, despicable epistle written with the only object of discrediting the supporters of the "Open Letter" in the eyes of the guileless members of the S.P.G.B.

While the E.C. in their reply are unable to make good their case of there being a possible necessity of our Party supporting reforms and palliatives in Parliament, they have devoted the greater portion of the letter to sheer abuse. They attempt to intimidate the members by accusing the supporters of the "Open Letter" of "initiating a policy of sectionalism and disruption;" they deliberately misrepresent the Committee by quoting sentences out of the context and thereby very much mutilating them; and lastly they raise dummy issues of their own and knock them down as quickly to their own entire satisfaction.

They begin their letter by calling the Provisional Committee merely "Committee", and that obviously because the work "Provisional" explains the need that existed at the time for the Committee being self-constituted. Formed for the purpose of finding out all the supporters of revocation, the Provisional Committee had to be self-constituted and could be nothing else. It is an utter absurdity to assert that to bring any question before the membership in any way or form strictly within the party amounts to not using ordinary channels. Besides, the subject under consideration forms the basis of a Party-poll now being taken by the E.C. at the demand of seven branches according to Rule. One poll has already been taken on the subject and discussions under the auspices of the Party have taken place concerning the question. How the propaganda of the revoking of the reply by any method within the Party can be described as "the initiation of disruption" is indeed a position beyond the comprehension of Socialists, who must necessarily favour the discussion of any point within the Party in any possible way. There was great need for the open letter and meetings under the auspices of the Provisional Committee, as on the first poll taken on the question barely one-third of the membership recorded their votes, while at the last annual conference only about twenty per cent of the members were present at the discussion of this point. What is significant to note is the fact that the supporters of the reply refused to discuss the entire question on Friday, the first day of the conference, when a much larger number of members attended than on the second day, viz., Saturday. We are compelled to designate as malicious, mean and contemptible the remarks of the E.C. as to the Provisional Committee being guilty of forming an organisation within the Party and of initiating a policy of sectionalism and disruption. If all those who at any time have to adversely criticise any actions of the Party laid

themselves open to be termed destroyers and disrupters, an outspoken opinion within the Party would become impossible and the organisation would be liable to develop into a corrupt and unsound one like the pseudo-Socialist organisations which we oppose.

And now as to the E.C.'s defence that the said reply does not contradict our Declaration of Principles. We are told that the reply is not speculative, but "a cautious statement based on positive knowledge and experience" amounting to "an implication that historic laws will continue". Surely the E.C. are not so wanting in understanding as to deny the speculative nature of such statements as: "measures that may conceivably contain some small advantages for the working class," or "we are always ready to consider new facts and phrases when they present themselves," or "there is room for difference of opinion upon a matter that at the present stage is only of secondary importance." Where, do we ask, does the positive knowledge come in with "conceivably contain," "new facts and phrases when they present themselves," and "there is room for difference of opinion," which are all statements of a most speculative character. It is the height of ignorance to speak of "historic laws continuing to operate," when the laws of history are dependent on the property basis of each respective society and are bound to change with a change in that basis. We have yet to learn that according to the materialist conception of history, historic laws are fixed quantities, as suggested in the reply of the E.C., instead of being what they really are, reflections of the property conditions for the time being. We also fail to see where the speculative character of the Provisional Committee's statement, "the capitalist class are compelled to open up ever new avenues of education to the proletariat" comes in. Had we said, "will ever be compelled" instead of "are compelled" that would have been speculative, but the word "are" expresses the experience and knowledge up to date and does not enter into the future. In spite of what the E.C. say as to the need of "frankly meeting a reasonable query by a genuine inquirer," we allege again that a full explanation as to the scope of our Parliamentary action is contained in our Declaration of Principles. There it speaks plainly only of capturing the political machinery and certainly not of any possibilities of supporting reform measures in the meantime. It will be seen therefore, that our Declaration of Principles contains all the Socialist information on this point.

The E.C. have altogether misinterpreted what we say about the Party not being prepared to give such replies from platform and press. Had they only also quoted the last portion of the paragraph anyone could have seen that our meaning is quite clear. We allege that when we are asked whether we would at present support any reforms or palliatives we answer emphatically "No." Therefore, we ask, why should we answer this question differently, when we have representatives in Parliament?

At the Conference Comrades Watts, Barker and Wilkins (Watford) spoke of "primary" and "secondary" objects. As to the fact that the first-mentioned has made the said statement, Comrade S. Quelch, the General Secretary pro. tem. of the Party, quite recently testified at an E.C. Meeting. We are told by the E.C. that our statement as to voting for or against any legislation is fatuous, because it would mean that we could not even vote for Socialism.

Now to vote for Socialism on the proposal of a capitalist faction, knowing that the workers are not yet determined to back us up, is absurd. When again, however, the workers are ready to enforce it mere voting for it will be of no consequence whatever, for it then must mean fighting for it.

The E.C. then endeavour to show that the capturing of the political machinery is possible only by Parliament - forgetting altogether that the workers if once revolutionary class-conscious would and could under any form of Government, even if autocratic, bureaucratic, or plutocratic seize the political machinery, thereby becoming the dominating class in society.

Our admitting that the capitalists are compelled to dig their own graves does not prove that in face of this fact we must suspend our hostility to the Capitalist class. On the contrary, their helping in digging their own graves does not touch the fact that the killing and burying of the capitalist class must be the work of the working class itself, and as the working class must do that the hostility must be upheld to the bitter end.

The Provisional Committee have not misstated their case when they alleged that the supporters of the reply to W.B. have divided the capitalist measures to be supported under four different heads. Comrades Anderson, Fitzgerald, Watts, Kohn and Jacomb and many more who do not so prominently write or speak for the Party have frequently spoken about "economic measures to improve the position of the workers or to save life and limb," also, of "measures of a political and educational character." And comrade Jacomb has repeatedly stated at E.C. meetings that in his opinion "the workers cannot obtain economic advantages by Parliamentary action, but it was certainly possible for them to get political or educational advantages by such action." Such argument amounts plainly to a flat contradiction of the declaration of principles of the S.P.G.B. which are based on the materialist conception of history according to which all educational and political measures must necessarily have their origin in economic conditions. To therefore suggest a possible interference with the shadow, while leaving the substance relating thereto, in fact, is, to say the least, a complete contradiction of the materialist conception of history.

Next the E.C. endeavour to upset the Provisional Committee's pronouncement that "the haggling for better conditions by the workers with their masters, whilst inevitable expressions of the class struggle, constitutes nevertheless action apart from the Socialist position and opposed to Socialism, as logically all mending of Capitalism must mean delaying the advent of Socialism."

The E.C. consider that they have demolished this most logical and forcible argument of the Provisional Committee by quoting passages from "Value, Price and Profit," by Karl Marx, concerning the need of resistance by the workers to the encroachments of the master-class. But to prove that a wage-slave is compelled to defend his wage-slave condition for the sake of his very existence as slave does not prove that by doing so he is taking action to abolish his wage-slavery. On the contrary, by fixing his attention upon his wage-slave condition and the possible improvement of same, he cannot help disregarding the only Socialist object, viz., the abolition of wage-slavery and the establishment of the

Socialist Commonwealth. And as to quotations from "Value, Price and Profit" a careful perusal of that little work will convince anybody that the great Socialist lesson sought by the same is unquestionably the "futility of fighting effects, instead of grappling with the only cause, wage-slavery." If Marx, already over 40 years ago, clearly saw the hopelessness of Trade Union action, as far as the Socialist object was concerned, how much greater has that hopelessness grown, in face of the rapid and enormous development of capitalism, with its stupendous concentration of capital on the one hand and its ever-growing economic degradation and declining value of the wage-slave commodity labour-power on the other.

The E.C. are amusingly muddled in their remarks about legislation playing a part in determining the conditions of wage-slave labour. From the platform and press of the Party we continually point out that it is the economic factors and their development which determine the wage-slave conditions of labour, necessitating the capitalist legislative machinery being used from time to time to mechanically adjust the differences arising from such development. But in their reply to our "Open Letter", the E.C. describe such mechanical legislative adjustment as amounting to partially determining the conditions of wage-slavery. Here we have again a most flagrant case of taking the effect to be the cause and the shadow to be the substance.

Gross misinterpretation again plays a part in the E.C., deliberately omitting the words "under Capitalism" in their quotation of our remarks about the "saving of life and limb". Surely we need not point out that a saving of life and limb can only take place when Socialism has been enforced. To talk about the need of saving life and limb in the meantime in order to "preserve the workers in general" amounts to our alleging that it is the business of Socialists to deal with effects, not the cause, and that in spite of the physical force of society being in the hands of the capitalist class, we can force measures beneficial to the working class from the parasite class. Now, as according to the object and declaration of principles of the S.P.G.B., there can only be one measure beneficial to the working class, namely, Socialism, it is the height of dishonesty to talk about several benefits, and especially about benefits in the meantime. We are challenged by the E.C. to name some members of our party who have stated that as Socialists we are compelled to support universal suffrage and the referendum. We therefore name Comrades Anderson, Dawkins and Fox as having made such statements. Their statements concerning the Referendum were contained in their allusions to the Socialist Party standing for the principles of democracy, even under Capitalism. It is almost superfluous to say that, given a private property basis, a democratic expression of convictions, and of action in accordance therewith, are an entire impossibility. The E.C. seem to claim that we contradict our position by admitting "that the capitalist class are compelled by the economic development to weaken their stronghold". There is no contradiction whatsoever. As the weakening of a strong person does not mean the strengthening of a weak person, neither does the loss of power on the part of the capitalist class mean the gain of power on the part of the working class, seeing that the increase of power of the workers is expressed solely by their acquiring a more extensive conception of revolutionary class-consciousness. As Socialists we allege on the other hand that the economic development under capitalism works all the time to the disadvantage of the working class. The "Committee" are then

may told that, holding as they do that Socialists must not support measures unless they can enforce them, such policy would "even exclude voting for Socialism". Such argument only shows that the E.C. consider the proposal of Socialism on the part of the capitalist class or a section thereof, and our voting for such purposes in Parliament as a possible way of the workers achieving their own emancipation. We have no such hallucination on this point. On the other hand, again, Socialists recognise that they will have to do considerably more than merely vote for Socialism before their object will be accomplished. Socialists can consistently refuse to vote for anything they cannot enforce, and yet vote for a candidate, though not numerous enough to elect him, and can use their votes in elections as Socialists, however few there may be of them. The voting at elections by Socialists is always on the basis of recognising the necessity of Socialism, while the voting for any legislation proceeds on the basis of recognising the need for the maintenance of the private property basis. And surely the E.C. can see the great difference in the issue of the two attitudes.

The E.C. resent our allusions to the fact that in the event of the capitalist class knowing that the Socialists are pledged to support certain reforms the capitalists need only divide themselves up into small factions, each with one particular object. Such dividing up is already done on a small scale. We have the Liberal Tory, Irish and Labour Parties each with certain reform objects, and therefore there exists every reason for believing that such system will be extended with the growing desire on the part of the workers to support a variety of reforms and palliatives. Our statement is therefore only dealing with the question of degree, and as the S.P.G.B. admit the possibility of supporting reforms and palliatives, the consideration of the quantity and quality of such do not alter the fact of the S.P.G.B. declaring that they may consider the efficacy of reforms and palliatives.

The logic of the E.C. seems to move in a vicious circle, thus: The capitalist class being compelled to dig their own graves and weaken their own stronghold, must mean advantages to the working class; measures aiming at these advantages must be supported by Socialists in Parliament; and such support does not amount to a suspension of hostility against the capitalist class. Now the Provisional Committee, on the other hand, hold on these points the following views: The digging of their own grave and weakening of their stronghold by the capitalist class themselves do not constitute advantages to the working class; according to the Socialist conception there is only one advantage obtainable, viz., Socialism; as the capitalist class cannot possibly give that advantage to the working class, but must in accordance with their interests oppose such advantage, Socialists cannot give support to any capitalist measures and must maintain their hostility to the capitalist class to the bitter end.

Comrade F.C. Watts, when speaking at the last Annual Conference on this question, laid great stress upon the tremendous complexity of the capitalist system, and argued that the want of understanding that complexity caused some members of the S.P.G.B. to disregard this very serious reason for favourably considering proposals of reforms and palliatives when brought forward in Parliament. The mere denying of the statement by the E.C. does not disprove of the same having been made in the hearing of a number of members of the Party. As to Socialists not being sent to Parliament to legislate the very fact of admitting the preparedness to consider

legislative measures on their merit proves that the E.C. admit the possibility of members of our Party taking part in legislation when in Parliament.

To consider anything short of a growth in the revolutionary class-consciousness of the working class benefits to the workers - whether they be "termed sectional benefits" or "putting a brake on capitalism" or "gaining new and effective weapons" or "fresh coigns of vantage in the fight for Socialism", is - as pointed out over and over again - misrepresenting the Socialist object and the struggle for its attainment, which admits of no patching up in the meantime. The E.C. are greatly mistaken if they think that there are grave contradictions contained in the following statements of the Provisional Committee.

"The capitalist class are as powerless as the working class; they are compelled to dig their own graves and weaken their strongholds," on the one hand, and "can make or mar any measure" and "can uphold or render nugatory any measure" on the other hand.

That simply means that the measures the capitalist class are compelled to introduce to save their own skin do not require the support of the workers, but such measures as they are not forced to carry through by the necessity of the development, they can certainly reject and are prepared to reject, hence there is no contradiction whatsoever.

But that does not credit the capitalist class with omnipotence, on the contrary it goes to prove that they are as much subject to economic laws as the working class. Further, we fail to see how putting the brake on capitalism's downward trend - which is becoming ever more futile as capital concentrates - the workers are doing anything to get nearer to the realisation of Socialism. If that is the true Socialist position, then all the pseudo-Socialist organisations are furthering Socialism by their propaganda of reforms and palliatives.

While the E.C. resist most emphatically any attempt at tying their supporters on this question down to their statements on "primary" and "secondary" objects, the E.C. themselves admit that this question plays but a "secondary" role. Now, how can the interpretation of our principles play a secondary role? We assert that this very allegation of it playing a secondary role opens the back-door to violating the principles of the Party. If members are made to believe that the interpretation of the Party's principles in Parliament plays a secondary role, while that interpretation from our platform and Press at present plays a primary role, then a change of front when the psychological moment arrives would, of course, be considered to matter little. Moreover, the facts determining Socialist action on principle cannot possibly change while the private property basis remains and must remain under capitalism. Hence the advice "Wait and see" is clearly an attempt to mislead and confuse our membership. The E.C., while explaining why a programme of reforms is absurd from the Socialist standpoint, nevertheless admit that the items of which such programme consists, as a rule, would be duly considered by Socialists in Parliament according to certain sets of circumstances and according to their usefulness or otherwise. This amounts to a complete admission that there are things of use to the Socialists on the basis of private property and that they are at times called upon to assist in capitalist legislation.

It is indeed amusing to read the quotations by which the E.C. endeavour to show how the Party has since its foundation pointed out "How little could be obtained short of Socialism". But since the last eighteen months a great deal of time and energy has been spent by them to prove the possibility of "that little" and the need for considering it on its merits when it comes along. We must add that if a number of contradictory statements on this question have appeared in the "Standard" that is no reason why the membership should now endorse the definite position taken up by the E.C.

It is a cowardly attempt on the part of the E.C. to prejudice the minds of the members by stating that the Committee are not unanimous on the issue. The E.C. are showing a lack of integrity of purpose if they deliberately suppress the fact that Snellgrove, to whom they refer, has left the Party as well as the Provisional Committee, because he has ceased to believe in Parliamentary action. The members of the Provisional Committee are completely agreed on the position laid down by the Committee.

We sum up by saying that the E.C. have failed to prove:-
 (1) That the S.P.G.B. should be out for more than one advantage, viz., Socialism. (2) That, therefore, measures containing conceivable advantages can be brought forward by the Capitalists. (3) That any new facts and phases can arise under Capitalism to alter the need for our fighting solely for the one object, viz., Socialism, always in hostility to the Capitalist class; and (4) that Socialists are sent to Parliament to support legislation, which must always mean the recognition of the preservation of the private property basis.

As the E.C. will not leave their high pedestal of abuse, rancour, and misrepresentation, and will not present a serious reply to our arguments, we leave it to the intelligence of the membership to decide this vital and important issue now before the Party.

THE PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE

38, Brixton Road, S.W.

16th August, 1911.